

Lent 3A

In some parts of India they provide resting places along the road for those who carry heavy loads on their heads. Such a resting place is called a *sumatanga*. These lay-byes have a shelf where the traveller can easily drop his or her burden. Referring to one of these a native Christian said: "Christ is my *sumatanga*". He was that for the Samaritan woman. She seemed weighed down with more than buckets of water.

Coming to draw water alone at the hottest time of the day rather than in the early morning as was the custom suggests that all was not well. She seems ill at ease with herself.

Having five husbands wouldn't have helped. We know Liz Taylor, God rest her, had seven or eight husbands but she can't have been that happy since it's said her life was blighted by addictions of one or another. But Lent is not the time for pointing the finger at others but facing up to our own addictions.

The woman tries a diversionary tactic by dragging disputed questions of race and religion into the conversation but Jesus gently turns the spotlight back on her. Have we ever tried to change the subject when we cannot face what we've done or dressed it up as something else? Jesus tells the woman that he and only He will be able to quench her thirst for inner peace not just in this life also in the world to come.

Jesus revealed the woman to herself. "He told me all I'd ever done", she said. Pope John Paul 11 once said that 'in prayer God reveals a person to themselves'. Self-revelation is no bad thing for us either, especially if we, like the woman, have been searching for fulfilment in the wrong places.

Just like the women of Samaria it's comforting to know that Jesus knows everything we too have ever done, good and bad in our lifetime. He accepts us as he finds us, the bad bits as

well as the good bits, but he doesn't want to leave us as he found us especially if, like the woman, we are in need of forgiveness and healing.

If we keep coming to the Well of Life, which is Jesus, whether it be in private prayer or confession or Mass we'll realise that our burdens are being lifted. The gospel tells us that having taken His words to heart, the woman puts down her water jar by the well, returns to the village and can't wait to tell the people of her life-changing meeting with Jesus. The isolation she felt in coming to the well on her own is now gone. She can face people with confidence again. There's a spring in her step. She eagerly shares her Good News with others. Dumping the heavy water jars by the well symbolises being set free from what was weighing her down.

So, as in the opening story, let Christ be our 'sumatanga', our resting place. There, the weight of our sins is lifted and we can leave any shadiness in our past behind. "Near restful water he leads me to revive my drooping spirit".